DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 392 FL 016 790

AUTHOR Keirstead, S. K.
TITLE A Recasting of Sapir's "Language, An Introduction to the Study of Speech."
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 42p.; Faint dot matrix print.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Context; Descriptive Linguistics; Diachronic Linguistics; Dialects; *Language; *Language Processing; Language Universals; Language Variation; Morphology (Languages); Morphophonemics; Phonetics; Phonology; *Speech Communication; Structural Analysis (Linguistics); Syntax
IDENTIFIERS *Sapir (Edward)

ABSTRACT

Edward Sapir's 1921 publication, "Language, An Introduction to the Study of Speech" is interpreted for beginning students of historical and descriptive linguistics. In his book, Sapir attempts to show (1) what he thinks language is, (2) what variables occur in language due to time and place, and (3) the relationship of language and thought. A glossary and list of references are included. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED283392

A Recasting of Sapir's "Language, An Introduction to the Study of Speech."

S. K. Keirstead

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S-K Keirstead

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

FL 016790

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Language

An Introduction to the Study of Speech

by Edward Sapir

Part One

Language: its Sounds and Form

Language was published in 1921 by Harcourt, Brace, and Company. It is still thought of as current and important enough to be included in the bibliographies of Leonard Palmer's *Descriptive and Comparative Linguistics* published in 1972 and Theodora Bynon's *Historical Linguistics* published in 1977. John Edwards in *Language, Society and Identity* (1985) quotes Sapir in his first chapter on basic concepts of language. Some of Sapir's insights about language are now being echoed and amplified by Chomsky and his contemporaries.

Sapir's stated purpose in this "little"[1] book is to show: 1. What he thinks language is. 2. What variables occur in language due to time and place. 3. What relationship language has to thought. He begins by attempting to define language as either instinctual or non-instinctual. He concludes that language is an act ordered

1 Sapir. *Language* p.iii

by the mind and not instinctual. A person needs culture, that body of social usage, in order to learn how to speak, but a person can learn how to walk without society being present, because the body parts needed for walking have that as their primary function. Speech is not the primary function of any bodily organs, it is a compound function of many parts in response to the need people have to communicate.

Sounds uttered in response to painful stimuli are not speech/language, because they are not primarily seeking to communicate to another being. Speech/language is a non-instinctive acquired cultural function. All attempts to explain the origin of speech logically have been useless.

Sound imitative words do not grow out of nature, as in an exact repetition, but are suggested by it. The onomatopoetic theory of speech that describes all speech as evolved from imitative sounds still links the sound production to an active thought process, not to an instinctual base. The theory is not very credible because some of the most primitive tribes and languages have virtually no onomatopoetic words. Language needs symbols to communicate and those symbols reside somewhere, but the

where of somewhere, remains unclear.[2] Physiologically speech is an overlaid function or group of functions.

Sapir defines language (or speech, which term he uses interchangeably), as: a purely human and non-instinctive way of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by a system of voluntarily produced auditory symbols. Without a hearer there is no speech.[3] This concept of language accepts that written language is a much later and further symbolized extension of speech. The exchange of auditory symbols by humans would be an acceptable definition of communication.

An inventory of images must exist before ideas can be conveyed. The system of conveyance is language, but the arbitrary system of symbols chosen by a particular societal group would be a specific language. The word, house, is a symbol of a capsule of thought, that is the amalgamation of all houses everywhere. Thought is the potential content of

---

2 Sapir indicates that the psycho-physical aspects of language are in various parts of the brain and other neural structures but cannot be pinned down to specific places. Today we know which parts of the brain create the physical aspects of language and some of the emotional parts but we still do not know all of the intricacies that control the thought-language continuum.

3 This is the general concept of speech not the specifics of a person already functioning in a culture who talks to himself.

speech. There is a difference between imagery and thought.[4] The growth of language may be dependent on the growth of thought, or they may be co-actions.

While language is primarily an auditory system of symbols, its production is that of a motor system of articulation. The formal patterning of a language is essential in its makeup. The sounds do not necessarily stay the same but the pattern base remains. Speech is both universal, and as diverse as the people who use it to communicate.

ELEMENTS OF SPEECH:

Words can be considered a fundamental concept in the auditory system of symbolism called language/speech. The concept can then have grammatical increments added to it to modify the meaning. Example: sing = word or concept, while sing + er = concept plus grammatical increment meaning doer. The grammatical increments that modify or change the concept can be any kind of affix.[5] Some concepts only exist by being appended to other concepts. Example:the plural

---

4 But what the exact difference is we do not know because is imagery part of thought or is thought part of imagery. Aristotalians would say that imagery precedes thought just as thought precedes language.

5 The affix can be an infix, suffix, prefix, reduplication or vocalic alteration.

concept symbol /s/ needs to be appended to another concept like boy+s = boys. The concept that we consider as base or root of word may be the only form of the word, or it may be a varietal form with several values.

Word, itself, is merely a form, a definite molded entity that takes in as much or as little of the material of whole thought as the particular language allows. A word does not have rigid solid value or concreteness by the fact of its being, rather it is a multidimensional symbol. Example: In English a word is a single or at most compound symbol while in some American Indian languages, the symbol designated as word would stand for a complete thought process like big-cow-that-stands-by-the-water-with-horns.

Speech, in production, runs words together so that sounds overlap, but words can be produced in isolation from their neighbors. Field-workers who are trying to discover a language have found over and over, that the native speaker can isolate words easily, but not make breakdowns beyond that point. A word is one of the smallest completely satisfying bits of isolated meaning. The emphasis on part of a word is called accent. Words are combined to form a linguistic expression of proposition, which we call sentence. This sentence entity has a subject of discourse

(subject) and a statement about the subject of discourse (predicate). Example: I (subject) go (predicate).

All languages have an inherent tendency to economy of expression.[6] There is no language that is completely consistent in its utterances, therefore there is no such thing as a perfect grammar. Language is not a fixed entity; it is a changing moving and somewhat slippery body of symbols which change with the needs of the societal group using them.

SOUNDS OF LANGUAGE:

The phonetic framework of a language describes only the physical sound of the language not the inner facts of the language. This phonetic approach looks at surface characteristics. Each language is made up of series of distinct sound bits,[7] which are grouped into words and sentences. Each language differs in the way it represents its sounds in written syllables. Example: in English we use

---

6 That is, a language over time will tend to use the most economical way to get the point across. The native speaker will instinctively assimilate sounds and simplify concepts. The smaller the group to which the speaker communicates, the more economical he can be because the group share or have many more things in common.

7 This appears to be a forerunner concept to Jacobson, Halle, and Chomsky's distinctive features approach.

the following symbols for: dogs, please, and stress, but the sounds are [z] and [s] for the last sound, so if a person from another language group that used only the [s] sound, tried to pronounce them he would pronounce [dogz] as [dogs].

The full range of sounds that humans are capable of producing is larger than all the sounds in all the languages known. Languages often use the same sounds but in different combination, so you see languages with consonant clusters and others with vowel clusters. The sounds are produced with breath from the lungs that moves up the larynx past the glottal (vocal) chords and through the nasal or oral cavity. There are some languages that produce sound on the reverse or incoming breath. The vocal chords produce voiced sounds when they are drawn together and the air must force its way past. Voiceless sounds are produced when the vocal chords are relaxed and apart. Pitch is determined by the laxness or tenseness in the direction of length of the chords. The voiced sounds carry all the significant differences in stress and pitch.[8]

The place and manner of articulation of the sounds of language are important to understanding the sound. There are four types of articulation in the consonant group. The stop sounds [t], [d], [p], are created when the breath is stopped at some point (point of articulation) in the oral

---

8 Vowels are normally voiced sounds.

cavity. The fricatives [s],[z],[v], are created when the breath is continuously constricted as it moves through the oral cavity. When the breath is semi-stopped the laterals are formed, and when the stoppage is rapidly intermittent it causes trills.

A fourfold classification of sound in any language would look at: the position the glottal (vocal) chords take, whether the breath goes through the mouth or the nose, whether the breath is impeded in the mouth or the nose, and where the points of articulation in the mouth are. The other considerations in regard to sound production are: length of vowel sounds, stresses, pitches, and combinations of phonetic elements.[9]

FORM IN LANGUAGE:

Formal form is the grammatical processes[10] of a language. The concept of vocalic change can be part of the grammar to a linguist. Each language has its own pattern for its utterances and this constitutes its rules and form.

---

9 Generally speaking stress are called accents and there are primary, tertiary and weak. The pitches are the tones. There are two tone classifications, contour and level. Level is made up of high and low. Contour is made up of four tones, high, rising, falling-rising, and falling.

10 Grammar, here, meaning the rules that the language functions by.

The six main types of grammatical forms are: word order, composition, affixation, reduplication, internal modification, and accentual differences (stress and pitch). A linguistic phenomena must have functional value in a given language to be considered illustrative of that language. Tone description in English is not illustrative of the language because it is not a functional notation.[11]

Word order is extremely important as a descriptive function in languages like English (an analytic language), on the other hand affixation would be important to a description of Latin (a synthetic language). Languages where word order is important tend to make compound words. Some languages cannot compound their radical elements (roots) but make complex words of one radical and many affixed elements (agglutinizing language). There are languages where composition or word building is done in very specific ways and becomes important as a descripter of the language.

Some languages compound SV (subject*verb) to form a complete thought in one word. Other languages compound nouns with nouns, adjectives with adjectives, or even verbs with adjectives. Each language has internal rules which

---

11 The pitch or tone of sounds or words is not phonemic or morphemic in English. Tone would be very illustrative in Chinese where tone is phonemic.

govern what may and may not be done.[12] Each language has its own order of composition or word building. Example: in English the qualifier precedes the stem -- pre+cede.

Affixing is the most commonly employed grammatical process, and of these the suffix is the most common. Chinese and Siamese (Thai) do not affix, all of their words are separate elements. A few languages like Turkish only add suffixes. Some are like Latin and add wherever needed. Example: remittebantur - they were being sent back (Remember this is one word to the Latin language no matter how many it is to English) re=back, mitt=send, eba=time, nt=person, and ur=passivity. This was one prefix, a root, and three suffixes.

Within a language certain functions will tend to be expressed by the same type of affix, so if a verb shows tense by adding a suffix, all verbs will most likely show tense by adding a suffix. These are general rules rather than inflexible rules. Infixing is seldom done in English but was common in the early Indo-European languages. English does employ a sub category of infix, which is known as an internal change of vowel or consonant. Example: sing; sang; sung; song. Vocalic change is of great significance

---

12 These are inherent rules not written down rules studied in the 8th grade. A native speaker would intuitively know what combination would be acceptable in that native language.

in Semitic/Arabic and American Indian languages. A change in the internal consonant is less common linguistically.

Reduplication is a grammatical process used often in the concepts or ideas of: distribution, plurality, repetition, continuance, customary activity, increase in size, increase in intensity, and continuance. In English reduplication of the whole word is often found in child-speech. Example: big-big dog for very large dog or two ball-ball for two balls. Example: Sanskrit -- darsha, I see. dadarsha. I have seen.

Stress and pitch can be more influential than first glance would indicate. Sometimes, as in English, the word meaning changes dependent on the stress, and the placement/position of the stress can only be deduced from the context of the sentence.. Example: to extract' versus an ex' tract. One means to pull out where the other is a distillation to strong proportion. In Chinese pitch variation is crucial to meaning and therefore is grammatical but in English it is not a grammatical process.

FORM IN LANGUAGE, CONCEPTS:

Various grammatical concepts are systematized in linguistic structure; such as the concepts of subject, action, object. No language expresses each and every concrete idea by an independent word/symbol. Sometime small words or definers/markers are necessary. Example: like the

definite article *the* or the indefinite article a, in English. These helpers or markers help define the statement or proposition. Another concept is order of the parts, like SVO (subject-verb-object). In some languages because the suffixes do the work, word order is not important. In English word order is important but there are still a few inflectional endings that have to agree. Example: The farmer kills the duckling: is an acceptable sentence, but: The duckling kills the farmer offends our ears. In English these five words in the second format could be said to express lack of coordination between function and form.

Sometime the only way to approach the understanding of fundamentally different modes of expression is by destructive analysis. The illogical or unbalanced points up the reason the native speaker uses certain conventions or intuitive rules of grammar. The concepts needed to provide communication differ from language to language, but there must always be a concrete notion underlying.[13] The concrete may be expressed by the context, rather than openly.

The fundamental syntax relations must be unambiguously expressed. These fundamental syntax relationships change with each language. There are occasionally languages that have concepts that are the same, but this not the general rule unless they are very closely related languages.

---

13 There must be a doer, an action, and an object of that action.

Concepts that are necessary for some languages are not necessary for others. Example: Plurality in Chinese is expressed by number or marker but never by changing the character. In English there are two conventions, the suffix /s/ and the morpholcgically conditioned change.

Gender is more important in highly inflected languages than it is in English. Sex and time if needed, can be conveyed by analogy and extensions of the relational sphere. Form has a tendency to stay on in a language beyond when needed for meaning. Example: English, he left, and he has left, the meaning at this point to the native speaker is the same and the native speaker will ignore the form <he has left> as redundant. The form will probably take several hundred years to pass out of the usage because the "educated person" will continue to try to insist on its use.

There is a tendency in language, especially for linguists, to try to fit all forms into a neat format. Sometime form is only phonetic and has nothing to do with anything else. Example: self, selves is the same plural sound as dogs but the ves came as a middle English spelling reform under the influence of French scribal practices.

Concepts can be described as being of two types, concrete and relational. The relational is dealing with describers of a something or to a something. Concrete is dealing with actual content. The concrete (material) is

essential to all speech and language communication.[14] The relational part can be left out but a language is much richer when the embroidery of relational is there. Example: The man ate the meal. The poor, tired, stoopshouldered gentleman in the ornate but dirty coat ate the meal of potatoes and buttermilk as if he had been fed caviar and lobster.

The more synthetic a language, the harder it is to see the difference between concrete and basic types. A full spoon is the same as a teaspoonful but the concept has changed from one to the other. The synthetic language is highly inflected so it is hard to define slight differences like the above because it does not have the mechanics to do it well.

It is impossible to carry over EXACT concepts from language to language because the form to convey them is often missing. Example: Imagine if you tried to carry a quart of water from *here* to *there*. The halfway point is a border. One of you had a pot to carry it in but the *there* people only had a glass. All the water could not be carried in the glass. The notions of wet and thirst quenching would

---

14 After all you have to have something to communicate or communicate about.

be conveyed but not the volume or weight of the quart because some of the water could not be conveyed.

A concept moves from concreteness to abstractness dependent on the way a particular language sees it, uses it, or needs it. Language as a linguistic expression is made up of material, content, and relationship with transitional ideas and forms falling in between. The relationship of word to word in some way (word order, inflection) is the form for a sentence. A sentence can be composed of three concrete symbols like: <boy> <eat> <cake>. Words establish a relationship once they are put in some kind of order that is relevant to the native speaker of that language. Example: (The) boy eat+s (the) cake.

(The) cake eat+s (the) boy.

Eat cake (the) boy?

The only one that is actually comfortable to the native speaker is the first one. So while sentences can be all concrete they must, in English anyway, have precise word order. In some languages stress can be used as a sequence unifier, or to emphasize linguistic contrasts.

There is even a theory extant that all syntactic relations are traceable to word order and stress/accent, which would mean that each and every thing once had a

concrete referent and that all abstracts were guessed at, known, or inferred.

Concord (agreement) typically and originally had sound repetition (word endings matched), that is words that should go together are outwardly marked by the same affixes. Example: In Latin and Greek there is concord between noun and adjective qualifier in gender, number and case. Agreement doesn't need word order though some languages use both formats but for different points. Most languages agree there is a doer (subject) and action (verb/verb phrase). There is usually a break designated between these two parts in some way in every language.[15] The language could communicate with just these two parts (doer and action) in their most basic guise, but would be better if sauced with relationship words.

TYPES OF LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE:

Each language operates on its own basic plan and every language has a basic plan though some are easier to see than others. This plan is more than just the rules of language in the sense of formal rules, it deals with the intrinsic

---

15 The subject (doer) [person or thing] {noun plus modifier} The predicate (action) [activity] {verb plus modifier}

rules that the native speaker operates from.[16] While languages can be classified for general purposes, they cannot be completely classified because we are not yet capable of grasping their inner essence. We would need the answer to the questions: Why are there similar types of language? and What makes them similar?, to begin to capture the essence.

Linguists are always searching for simple neat answers to complex questions. One of these is the question of how languages should be classified. Classifying language is like trying to push a round balloon into a square box; it will take on the dimensions of the majority of the box but the true fit is not there and it will return to its shape when allowed out of the box. Evolutionary prejudice also clouds the attempts to classify language. In the last century there was a perception that Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and German were the languages of the highest level and that everything else was a corrupted or denigrated form. With this kind of prejudiced premise classification becomes almost impossible, because square pegs are being forced into round holes.

Language in its most fundamental form, from an unemotional scientific approach, is a symbolic expression of

---

16 The concept of the native speaker and intrinsic rules is one that N. Chomsky has expanded on. Again this concept of Sapir's shows what a visionary he was.

human intentions. Each language expresses its fundamental syntactic relations in some format; therefore each language has form, be it internal or external. In analytic languages like English, the sentence and order of words is of prime importance, and the word itself is of secondary importance. In a synthetic language the ideas are rich and gathered into embellished (affixed) words. Despite the embellishment of the word there is still a tendency in synthetic languages to keep the word concrete. While total classification still eludes us and the classifications of the past were poor fits, one must start somewhere to begin to unravel the mysteries of the language and so we will use the old classifications as far as they go, amplifying and modifying where needed.

In the polysynthetic language the elaboration of the word is extreme and does not help describe what is actually happening. The terms; analytic, synthetic, and polysynthetic are more helpful in seeing the way a language is moving, rather than capturing the essence of what it is. With help from older classification forms and inventions of new terms, we shall attempt a broad classification of language.

Groups of languages that keep syntactic relations pure and do not possess the power to modify the significance of

their basic elements by affixes or internal changes are simple-pure-relational languages. An example is Chinese.

Those languages that keep syntactic relations pure but can modify their basic elements by affixes and internal change are complex-pure-relational. Examples would be Polynesian and Sioux.

Those languages in which syntactic relations are expressed in connection with less than concrete ideas but which cannot modify their basic elements with affixes or internal change are called simple-mixed-relational languages. Examples are French and Bantu.

The languages in which the syntactic relations are expressed in mixed format and that also have the ability to affix and make internal changes are called complex-mixed-relational. Examples are Chinook, English, Latin, Sanskrit and Semitic.

The classifications above, all relate to groupings of the older terminology which can be used to help explain the new labels. Agglutinative, fusional, symbolic, isolating, analytic, synthetic, and polysynthetic are still useful words in describing language, but they are not specific or encompassing enough, because languages are exceedingly complex historical structures. An observation that will need further study, that we are not capable of at this point, is that languages of the same class have a lot of

other similarities. The significance of this may point to some deeper relationship that could help to explain the underlying concepts of language.[17] Classifications should never be accepted at face value, but should be tested at every possible opportunity.

Languages show gradual morphological changes and the degree of change is usually the greatest in the synthesis area. Chinese is the most isolating language we are familiar with but its near family member, classical Tibetan, has picked up fusional and symbolic features. Chinook and Takelma, distantly related, have diverged in both technique and synthesis, but details of structure in both follow the complex-mixed-relational classification.

Attempting to find a scientific basis to language classification is a necessity if language is to be completely understood. Language, speech, auditory symbol process or whatever the label that one wants to use is that which allows man to communicate. The concept of communication of intelligence both concrete and abstract is something that humans have and do not share with any other species. To understand what this communication mode is, why it differs in form and presentation and how it can be

---

17 Sapir seems to be looking into the future and seeking the deep structure research of Chomsky.

manipulated are all parts of the unknown that the scientific process must uncover.

Part Two

Language; its Drift and Cultural Implications

Sapir, not only, was concerned with finding out what language is, but also with how it moves, and how it relates to people. One of his axioms was that language is variable, no two speakers of a language speak in exactly the same way.[1] Each person differs in speed, stress, and tone, however, there is an ideal linguistic entity that dominates the speech habits of members of a group. The speech habit domination occurs when people are "corrected" by an unconscious consensus of usage.[2] This concept is also known as the language being controlled by a tacitly directing

---

1 This is partly because the human vocal chords are not so precise as to make the same sound exactly the same way, time after time. Also people have vocal chords and other physical apparatus used in speech production that vary with the individual.

2 We have all seen someone start to or make an utterance and correct themselves without ever realizing that they had made the correction.

norm.

If a language is spoken in two distinctly different localities, in time the variations of each will magnify until they are mutually unintelligible. The tacitly directing norm does not exert itself because the language change within each group is so gradual and internal that the norm ends up modifying itself. The modification is known as culture infringement upon the language and explains how old dialects get wiped out to make way for new ones.[3] Languages can undergo changes in phonetics, morphology, and vocabulary but their underlying forms will remain true.

Dialects or varieties within a language diverge or become "more different" as the distance between groups grows larger. As people converge, as in migrations to large urban centers, their dialects become less different and one dialect becomes the major speech pattern for the area.

Many modern languages are, according to Sapir, dialect divergences of Proto-Indo-European which became mutually unintelligible over the millennia. We may all speak dialect divergences from some single original language that has been lost.[4] Most historical linguists accept that there are a

---

3 These are not changes that take place over a few months or days but rather hundreds of years.

4 This theory of Sapir's was not provable at the time of his writing, nor is it yet provable or disprovable. There are

number of major language families. Lehman cites seven principle language families: Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Altaic, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Finno-Ugric.[5] The languages within each family form a tree of relatedness, a linguistic stock. Though historical language connections have been found between language culture areas, the babel of languages has not been reduced to a single source.

Sapir believes that language only exists if it is actually used in spoken, heard, or written form. In other words, there has to be communication for language to exist. It is also analogous to the theory that a tree falling in the forest without anyone hearing it does not make sound.

All changes in language begin as an individual variation. Only variations that move in a direction of simplifying the language take hold. Example: English - Whom did you see? >>> Who did you see? to the native speaker. When linguists study drift, they look to the everyday man[6] not to the grammarian. The grammarian wants

---

theories that language started at the same time in different places and that it started only in one place, but until the science of linguistics and the science of time manipulation are much more advanced, we can not state certainly what the origin of language is.

5 Lehmann, Winfred P. *Historical Linguistics,* 2nd edition

6 Chomsky's native speaker.

to freeze language so that it can be packaged up neatly and stay put. Language moves, grows, and changes constantly. The simplification of <whom> to <who> is an unconscious desire for symmetry that exists in all speakers. Which, what, and that do not have an objective case ending in English, so why should who? - - That is the argument of symmetry.

In drift there is a tendency for language to level the distinction between subject and object. Example: The seven cases of pronouns that existed in Indo-European became four cases by Old English and further consolidation was seen as case endings disappeared in the accusative and dative cases in Middle English. Only a few case endinds are left in modern day English. There is also a tendency in language drift to a fixed position of words determined by the syntactic relation of the words. (Word order becomes more important to the sense of the communication when inflected endings drop off.) Example: The cat runs after the mouse. The mouse runs after the cat.= nonsense.

The third major tendency showing up in drift is the tendency to strive for simple correspondence between word and idea. Example: goodness and good convey enough

difference in concept that both will probably survive. Quickly and quick are so close in meaning, that in usage only one will survive. Word drift in English welcomes new forms which seems to compensate for the losses that occur. If a language loses too much of its usage it becomes impossible to convey ideas and the people will grab another language.

LANGUAGE AS A HISTORICAL PROCESS:

Nothing in language is completely static. Language moves in certain consistent directions but at varying rates of speed. Example: Lithuanian in 1920 is closer to Proto-Indo-European than the hypothetical Germanic mother tongue was 2500 years ago. Languages do not all move along the exact same drift but the overall drift is similar. Languages that have long been mutually unintelligible have relationships that are obvious to linguists, who act like detectives in tracing languages. They have found that languages that seem entirely different have gone through the same or similar drift phases in phonetics or morphology.

Gradual phonetic change is probably one of the most important phenomena in linguistic history. Linguists like to propose rules that are supposed to guide language but the rules of 2000 years ago do not fit the sound of language today. Slight phonetic differences keep building until a large change evolves. It is similar to the way the city of Venice is sinking. One does not see the change from one

year to another but the houses built in the eighteenth century now have water covering their first floors. Linguists are able to see changes by similar hindsight processes.

There is a growing tendency to throw stress on the first syllable which could eventually lead to the loss of last syllables. That change, plus assimilation in vowels, explains how German foti eventually became feet. Example: foti > Fote > Fotθ > feet. There is also a tendency in drift to reduce unaccented syllables and finally to drop them completely. Modification also occurs in vowel of root because of a following vowel in the stem or suffixed segment.

Phonetic changes tend to be regular. The same sounds change in the same way no matter what the language is. Drift is a change not toward a particular set of sounds but rather toward particular types of articulation.[7] Vowels become high or low, diphthongs become monophthongs, voiceless consonants become voiced, and stops become fricatives in this process. Many of the laws that have been formulated about phonetics are nothing more than

---

7 This a place where Sapir indicates that the articulation moves instinctively to what is easier or simpler in the articulatory process, which is somewhat in opposition to all his earlier statements about speech being a conscious effort rather than instinctual.

descriptions of what happened during a particular drift phase. The same drift showed up in a number of related languages and therefore was called a law of sound change.

The causes of drifts in phonetics are not known and to propose easy answers would not be a service. The patterns of sound must be studied as well as the relationships of individual sounds. Patterns of sound change are sometimes merely readjustments to the basic sound pattern of the language. Phonetic change is often followed by morphological rearrangement. Phonetics should not be studied in isolation because it is part of a bigger whole. Speech sounds are the symbolic carriers of ideas and groups of ideas. The sounds can change because of drift but that does not mean that the symbolic representation needs to change. Phonetic changes may at times be unconsciously made to keep intact the psychological spaces between words and word forms.

Phonetic change is made up of: 1. A general drift in one direction.[8] 2. A readjusting tendency which aims to preserve or restore the fundamental phonetic pattern of

---

8 Of which we know almost nothing as to reason or beginning or ending points.

language. 3. A preservative tendency which sets in when a too serious morphological unsettlement is threatened by the main drift. These three features often intertwine. The pattern of any given language changes far less than the sounds that compose it. A pattern of stops will continue even if the sounds shift from the unvoiced to the voiced. Example: p,t,k, >>>b,d,g.

Sound changes work mechanically and seem to be guided by regularity. Example: The strong verbs of Old English have for the most part changed to the weak or regularly ending verbs. Analogy not only regularizes irregularities that come in the wake of phonetic processes, but also cause changes that make things simpler or more regular, and is considered to be part of the morphological drift as well. Example: /s/ plural was originally on only one class of masculine nouns in early English but became extended to virtually all nouns by early modern English. In German the interior change or umlaut plural became the regular one.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE:

While language is important, it is not self-sufficient and needs people culturally interacting. Language is communication between people. People of different culture groups use language as a tool in business, war, food acquisition, religious devotions, sexual exchanges. The influence of these exchanges extends to the language. If the language is missing a lexical article needed in an

interchange that another language has; it will be borrowed. Usually the borrowing flows in one direction. Thousands of words came into English during the period of Norman domination over England.[9] Very few words flowed into the French language. Chinese has flooded the vocabularies of Korean, Japanese and Annamete for centuries but did not take anything back.

The simplest influence one language can have on another is word borrowing. When the word that is borrowed is also a cultural concept that is not present in the receiver language, then both concept and word form move into the receiver language. Example: Romans had paved roads called strata that the German were impressed with, as they had no paved roads, so they borrowed the concept and the word. strata (lat.) >> (ger.) strasse. Words and concepts are borrowed but the sound system of the receiver language is imprinted on the new words.

---

9 Generally thought of as the 300 years after the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

The study of word borrowing is a study of dominant cultures and how they surged and retreated. Sapir says that there are only five language that have had an overwhelming significance as carriers of culture to other groups. They are: Classical Chinese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek, and Latin.[10]

The psychological attitude of the borrowing language itself toward linguistic material has a lot to do with the reception of those words. Some people and languages find it hard to assimilate new words unless they can find root parts to put their own endings on. Those languages instead often create words from within their own language combining parts to make a new term. Even when sounds are borrowed along with the word there is modification so that the word fits the underlying pattern of the receiving language.

Language is the most self-contained, massively resistant of social phenomena in its underlying and basic patterns. Similar phonetic features often show up in languages that are of different linguistic stock and the reason is unknown.[11] The physical and cultural aspects of

---

10 At the time Sapir did not count English, because he said that the colonized tongues would probably revert. He also could not have known of the vast technological borrowings of other languages and cultures from English.

11 It may be related to the deep structures of the languages.

people have studied by anthropologists as well as linguists. At times the disciplines overlap to a great degree.

A group of languages does not always seem, on the surface, to conform to a racial or cultural group, but may be the primary language of the group. Example: English is the only language for millions of Blacks in the U.S., English is also the only language for millions in India, and England. Three different cultures, at least two races and the same language -- but used quite differently in each social group. While language and culture have an interdependence they are not intrinsically related or necessarily correlated.

The latent content of all languages is the same intuitive science of experience, and the specific content of a specific language is the manner a selected specific needed inventory of concepts is expressed. Language is concerned with communication, and the drift in language is the perception of changes in formal representations of language. The specific content of a specific language is the result of the needs of the culture that is functioning with and in the language. Example: If a culture does not use forks it does not need a language representation of the concept, fork.

Language that is unusually significant and written, within its culture, is called literature. The innate formal limitations of each language's literature are different, because each language imposes its own restrictions and possibilities. Translating the great literature of one language to another is seldom successful[12], because nuancesof one language cannot be captured by another. Style must flow within the basic pattern of a language and what works in one cannot always be moved to another. Each

---

12 Except for the great writers who transcend the language they operate in e.g. Shakespeare

language has its own collective of expressions whether phonetic, rhythmic, symbolic, tonal, or morphological.

To realize what the essential nature of a language is, one must start with what it is not. A linguistic student should not identify a language solely with or by its vocabulary. "Language....is the most significant and colossal work that the human spirit has evolved - nothing short of a finished form of expression for all communicable experience."[13]

---

13 Sapir. *Language*. p235.

Glossary

Accusative: That case, in Indo-European languages, that is the object of the verb or preposition. The case endings affected nouns, pronouns, adjectives or numerals. The case endings are used in inflectional languages.

Affix: The collective word that means all segment additions to a root - as; prefix, suffix, infix, reduplication.

Agglutinative Language: A language in which bound morphemes occur one after the other. Such languages will have pre-prefixes and compound suffixes.

Alphabet: A system of symbols to represent the separate sounds of a language.

Analogy: The tendency or process of creating or changing words based on patterns that already exist.

Analytic Language: A language in which word order and auxiliary words are the means of expressing grammatical relationships. The opposite of inflectional.

Borrowing: Transfer of lexical material from one language and/or culture to another.

Bound Form: A linguistic entity, not pronounced by itself, in a particular language, but attached to another linguistic entity.

Brackets: [] used to enclose phonetic rendering of sounds, words, or other phonetic notation.

Contour Tone System: A four tone tone system consisting of: high-level, rising, falling-rising, and falling.

Culture: That which society does and thinks.

Dative: In Indo-European languages, the case form that is used to denote an indirect object.

Diachronic: From the historical point of view. Viewing changes in sound over a time period.

Diphthong: A sequence of two vowel sounds acting like one phoneme.

Drift: A consistent diachronic change in the pattern of a language. A tendency of a language to move in a specific way in a seeming current that causes the language to break up into dialects because of specific phonetic tendencies.

Fricative: A sound during which friction can be heard and identified at some point of articulation.

Fusional: A language in which parts are fused to arrive at grammaticalness. See synthetic.

Genitive: In Indo-European languages, the case that expresses possession.

Grammar: The innate rules that govern a native speaker's use of the language. Also the science of the structure of a language.

Inflectional Language: Any language which expresses grammatical relations of words and shades of meaning by affixing (prefix, suffix) to the roots of words. (Also known as flexional.)

Isolating Language: A language in which all the words are invariable and their interrelationship in a sentence is indicated solely by their relative position and connecting words. See analytic.

Language: Is a symbolic expression of human intuitions.

Lexical: Relating to the total amount of linguistic signs (words or morphemes) in a language.

Linguistics: The science and study of language.

Literature: Writings in prose or verse having excellence of form and/or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest.

Monophthongs: A phoneme pronounced as a single sound.

Morphemes: Are the minimal meaningful units which may make up words or parts of words.

Morphology: Is the study of morphemes and their arrangements in forming words. A descriptive analysis of words.

Nominative: The case form used as a grammatical subject of a sentence. The case endings attendant on nouns, pronouns or adjectives fulfilling the subject relationship.

Pattern: The structural relationships of sets of sounds in a phonetic system.

Phonemes: A single individual speech sounds, a minimum unit of distinctive sound.

Phonemics: The study, analysis and classification of phonemes, their relationship and changes.

Phonetics: The study of speech sounds of humans in communication and language by articulartory analysis and auditory judgment.

Polysynthetic Language: A language in which meaningful elements (direct objects, subjects) are expressed by bound forms.

Prefix: Addition (affix) before the root expressing grammatical or meaning concept.

Proposition: Any complete utterance or assertion.

Stress: A degree of intensity upon some syllable which makes it more prominent or louder than an unstressed syllable.

Suprasegmentals: A prosodic feature like stress, intonation, juncture, tone, and terminal symbol.

Syntax: Order and combination of words in an utterance. The study and science of sentence construction.

Syntactic: Pertaining to construction in accordance with grammatical rules.

Synthetic Language: One that is highly inflected in cases, numbers, genders, and moods. See inflectional.

Tone Language: A language characterized by variations in pitch that change meaning by their use. Thai and Chinese are tonal languages.

Word: A spoken or written symbol of an idea, image, or concept.

Reference List

Bynon, Theodora. *Historical Linguistics.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Eastman, Carol M. *Aspects of Language and Culture.* San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1975.

Edwards, John, *Language, Society and Identity.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.

Gleason, H. A. Jr. *An Introduction to DescriptivetcaLinguistics.* New York: Henry Holt, 1955.

Hockett, Charles F.,ed. *A Leonard Bloomfield Anthology.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970.

Lehmann, Winfred P. *Historical Linguistics.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

McKay, Janet Holmgren, and Spencer Cosmos. *The Story of English.* Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1986.

Neeld, Elizabeth Cowan. *Writing 2nd Edition.* Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1986.

Nida, Eugene A. *Morphology* 2nd ed. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1976.

Palmer, Leonard R. *Descriptive and Comparative Linguistics.* London: Faber & Faber, 1972.

Pei, Mario A. and Frank Gaynor. *A Dictionary of Linguistics.* New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.

Pike, Kenneth L. *Phonemics.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975.

Sapir, Edward. *Language An Introduction To The Study Of Speech.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921.

The University of Chicago. *The Chicago Manual of Style, 13th ed.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982

Williams, Joseph M. *Origins of the English Language.* New York: The Free Press, 1975.